

Protected: Director's Cut

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Protected: Director's Cut

by Anonymous

Summary

A series of one-shots, deleted scenes, and alternate timelines that were replaced or discarded during the writing of 'Protected'. Reading of the original fic before this one is highly encouraged, unless you enjoy being confused and spoiled simultaneously. :)

Notes

Hi again, everyone!

Well, after posting the last chapter of Protected, it seemed like there was more than enough interest for me to justify this entirely self-indulgent fic - so thank you for enabling me! :) This will be a series of extra scenes and alternate timelines that didn't quite make the cut for the main story, for various reasons that I'll explain chapter to chapter. I may also decide to write a few epilogue one-shots regarding various scenes that happen after the last chapter of Protected. :)

If you haven't read the original story yet! Stop and go no further! You'll get spoiled in case you are interested in the main story, and you won't enjoy these scenes very much without context, I imagine. [Here's the link to Protected. :\)](#)

I'm not sure how much I'll update this, but I'll post a few chapters right away so y'all have an idea of what this will look like, and if you're interested in subscribing or otherwise following along.

As always, thanks so much for reading!

deleted scene: pendant

Chapter Notes

I originally wrote this scene to take the place of the armor scene that takes place in twenty, pt. 1. I rewrote this scene maybe 1000 times and couldn't get it quite right. I liked the idea of George giving Dream a birthday gift because it just seemed sweet, but the slightly goofy tone didn't flow with the otherwise serious tone of the chapter's beginning. Then I realized that they just needed to kiss at this point lmao – so I had to restructure a bunch of stuff and this just didn't make the cut. Still, I loved this scene and did a weird amount of research for it w/r/t the gift itself. So – here it is!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

By the end of his seventh day as king, Clay was exhausted on a bone-deep level. There were still a few advisors hoping to speak with him, but the sun had set many hours ago, and he took his leave, apologizing to those who remained and promising to speak with them first thing in the morning.

Clay left the Grand Hall and walked towards his room, and though he knew he was moving forward, he could barely feel his legs, could barely feel his feet hit the stone. His surroundings passed him in a haze, his mind fuzzy and slow.

He hadn't moved rooms, although it was customary for the king to occupy the master bedroom. Maybe he would, someday. For now, that room felt haunted. It was where his father had died, and Clay wasn't ready to face that space in the dark. And, besides, he found comfort in the way his quarters hadn't changed, despite the fact that everything else had been turned upside down.

Tonight, his room was lit by a warm fire in the hearth. His bed was made and a tray of food sat out on the table. George was curled in an armchair close to the fireplace, asleep.

Clay laughed softly as he closed the door behind him softly and tried to move towards the food without waking his servant, but the creak of his weight against the wooden floor pulled George awake. He yawned and blinked blearily up at Clay. "Hi, Dream."

"Hi," Dream said simply, sitting down heavily in a chair and immediately digging into the food on the table.

"Long day," George remarked, stretching his arms above his head.

"You're telling me."

"Did you get to talk to Eliza at all?"

Dream scrunched up his face at George.

"The noblewoman from Nemeth."

“Oh.” Dream conjured up a vague image of a woman with a shock of red hair. She had come to discuss the rising tensions. “Yeah. She didn’t seem too optimistic about being able to help. There’s a lot of dissidence in Nemeth, I think.”

“Ah.” George sighed and got up from the armchair, walking towards Dream and hopping up to sit on an empty spot on the table in front of him. “Must have been frustrating.”

“It doesn’t matter,” Dream said, deflecting. “We can fight our own battles.”

George narrowed his eyes. “You don’t have to do that around me, you know.”

“Do what?”

He lifted his shoulders in a shrug. “Pretend like everything is fine.”

Dream stared at him for a long moment. George held his gaze. It was so different from the way other people looked at him these days. It wasn’t disrespectful, but it wasn’t fearful or fake. George was actually looking at him. At *him*. Not King Clay.

“I guess I don’t, do I?” Dream sighed. “I’ve never had to.”

George leaned over and fixed the collar of Dream’s shirt, which had turned inside out. His hand smoothed it, brushing over Dream’s collarbone. The touch woke something up inside of Dream, his attention pulled to the point of contact.

“I have something for you,” George said, breaking Dream’s thoughts away from their brief spiral.

“Oh?” Dream said, and watched as George pulled something out of his pocket. It was a small parcel, wrapped in plain brown paper and tied with a string.

George held it out to him. “Happy birthday.”

Dream blinked at the package, and then at George.

“Did you forget?” George asked with a sort of weary fondness, his eyes crinkling around the edges.

“I... I guess I did,” Dream said numbly, taking the parcel from George’s hands.

“You’re twenty,” George said. “Two decades. It’s a big deal.”

“I guess it is,” Dream said, turning the package over in his hands. It was very light. The paper was rough, like sandpaper, and the string was tied carefully. The clear care that had gone into it was enough to short-circuit his brain, a bit. It was like looking at a relic from another time.

George cleared his throat. “Uhm... you gonna open it?”

“Right,” Dream said, laughing once. “Right.”

He untied the string and unfolded the paper, catching a small trinket as it fell out. It was a small, roughly-cut stone, maybe an inch or two wide, with a semi-transparent white color, a sort of fabric cord running through it.

“What is this?” Dream asked, turning it over in his hands.

“It’s a necklace,” George said. “My gran makes them. They, uh – the stones are supposed to have different properties, I guess. Here.”

He motioned Dream up and took the necklace from his hand. Dream stood as George unraveled it, and then he looped the necklace over Dream’s head. The stone fell just over his heart.

“White quartz,” George said, his face going decidedly pink.

“What... *properties* does it have?” Dream asked, faintly amused.

“It brings physical strength, and fortune in battle,” George said, fidgeting with the necklace and then looking up at Dream. “And protection.”

Dream felt a grin spread on his face, his first genuine smile all day. “Well. Those are some things I could definitely use.”

“Do you like it?” George asked, going redder by the second.

“I love it, George,” Dream said quietly. “Thank you.” He tucked the pendant into his shirt so the stone rested against his chest. It felt almost warm against his skin.

George hummed happily, then rolled his eyes. “I can’t believe the whole kingdom forgot your birthday.”

Dream laughed. “I think the kingdom has bigger things on her mind.”

A knock at the door interrupted them, and George took a quick step back from Dream, looking towards the sound.

“Come in,” Clay called.

It was Sapnap who opened the door, and his face looked strange, somewhat mystified.

“Hey, uh... you guys are gonna want to see this. *Both* of you.”

Chapter End Notes

yeah – I think I was gonna have Tommy show up at this point initially, but then I realized someone needed to be there to get Dream back to George in pt 2 – okay this is all getting convoluted now lol, hope you enjoyed the scene!

deleted scene: kiss

Chapter Notes

this deleted kiss scene comes from a terrible horrible no good very bad universe in which the boys don't kiss until, Yes, The Very End! the scene IMMEDIATELY following this one would have been the "this can be for us" scene from the epilogue. wouldn't you all have hated me?? luckily this was a case of, 'this scene got written very early when i was thinking about it and bits and pieces of it got repurposed into the ACTUAL first kiss scene later.' still, i like a few bits in here that didn't make it in. anyway, here's that!

warnings: idk it's a liiiittle bit more scandalous than what made the actual cut but nothing graphic!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

deleted scene: *kiss*

"Why did you come back for me?"

Dream looked sharply at George but George wouldn't meet his gaze. He was staring straight ahead, his eyes wide and vulnerable, and suddenly they may as well have been fourteen again, sitting cross-legged in the forest, children trying desperately to be adults but unable to grasp what that meant, fumbling for words, stumbling around their feelings for each other, each skirting the obvious – the inevitable.

Dream was no longer a child.

He touched George's hand and felt the familiar spark of heat at the touch of George's skin. George looked up finally and met his gaze, and Clay saw everything in his face, saw shock and fear and uncertainty, but also saw everything swirling in his own chest mirrored back at him – the hope, and the adoration, and the wanting, like a raw nerve –

Dream kissed him and found him soft and pliant, George gasping softly into his mouth before kissing back wantonly, almost desperately. Dream's hands roamed to touch George's chest, his neck, to cup his face and feel him melt into the touch –

George moved quickly and surely as he swung his leg over Dream's lap and straddled him, grabbing his face and kissing him again with force and hunger, and Dream made a low sound in his throat and wrapped his arms around George, overwhelmed with the feeling of him, heavy and close, fitting so perfectly against him as they captured each other's mouths over and over.

After a timeless moment, it could have been seconds or hours, George broke away, panting slightly for breath. His eyes were blown wide, his face flushed, and Dream was overwhelmed by the raw emotion on his face as he brought his hands up just to touch Dream's face, spreading his

fingers over his cheek, brushing his thumb over Dream's lips.

"You haven't answered my question," George finally said breathlessly, his kissed-pink mouth breaking into an impossibly happy grin.

Dream felt a smile to match spread across his own face, and he couldn't help but laugh as he grabbed George and flipped him over onto the bed, ignoring George's squeaks as he pressed kisses down his face and neck. "You're such an idiot," he mumbled into the crook of George's neck, "my idiot," possessively, scraping his teeth against George's skin, and felt him shudder, whisper "yes, Dream, yours," in a broken voice that sent shock waves rocking through Dream's entire body. He brought his head up and kissed George again and again, pushing his fingers through George's hair, and felt George whimper and arch up off the bed for more, more touch, more contact, more –

And it was perfect – it was everything.

Chapter End Notes

may have also written this while especially desperate for physical affection soooo my bad if it's a little Much lmao (TBF if these characters had to wait 100K words to finally kiss they would also be desperate too ok? ok. moving on)

alternate timeline: pyre

Chapter Notes

listen, i am an angst queen at heart and you cannot ask me to spend 100k words talking about george's fear of being burned to death without taking a minute to write an alternate timeline in which he gets caught using magic during 'sixteen' and gets put on the pyre. i mean, you can ask, but the answer will be no

warnings: major character death!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

alternate timeline: *pyre*

They had grabbed him before he even had time to think. The last thing he remembered seeing was Tommy's face, pale and stricken with surprise, as George was dragged away.

He hadn't even seen Dream's reaction.

They had thrown him into chains, cuffs around his hands and legs, and stuffed a rag in his mouth to prevent him from casting spells. He tried breaking the cuffs with just his elemental strength, but the iron was too strong, and he was too inexperienced. He didn't know how to get out. He didn't...

Panic swelled up in his chest and he felt himself start to hyperventilate. He pulled his legs to his chest as best he could and hugged himself, trying to prevent himself from trembling.

He wanted to be brave. He wanted to be strong. He wanted to feel like this was worth it, because Dream was alive, and wasn't that supposed to be his purpose?

But it was one thing to think about this possibility, and another, entirely, to live it.

George stayed awake, all night. He was not brought to a trial. An unfamiliar knight informed him of his sentence. He barely acknowledged it. The words felt redundant. He would burn. It was the only answer. The only possibly outcome.

Always one knight there with him, his gaze kept on him, pinning him to the wall as surely as the chains did. Two knights outside the doors, guarding his only escape. If he tried to escape, would they stab him? Was that preferable?

And then, some unfathomable amount of time later, he heard a commotion outside the prison door. Shouting.

"*Let me in!*" he heard, and his heart jolted in his chest, grief and terror and longing all stabbing him deep through his ribcage, because Dream was there, he was just outside, and he was trying to get in – "please, just let me talk to him, I just need to talk to him. God damn it, I'm the

prince, let me through –,

There was a thud against the door and then it wrenched open, and George jerked forward against his chains, craning his head to see –

Dream, his hair and eyes wild, struggling against the hands of two knights who were holding him back bodily.

They made eye contact for one desperate moment.

“*George!*” Dream shouted, his voice breaking, and George tried to shout back, but the gag muffled his words.

“Prince Clay, you can’t come in,” George heard a knight say, “your father --,”

“I just want a minute – just a minute, please – *please!* You have to let me – damn it, *George* --,”

George sobbed, folding over himself, because god, Dream was here, he wanted to see him, he –

Suddenly Sapnap was there, too, and he was pulling the knights off of Dream, throwing them down the hallway. The two of them were *fighting*, and George watched with astonishment as they knocked out the two guards standing outside the door, bursting in through the heavy wooden door, and Sapnap clashed with the guard inside the dungeon, shoving him back against the wall, as Dream yanked open the door to the cell, crashing to his knees next to George.

“George,” he breathed, and George pulled towards him until his chains yanked his shoulders back. Dream reached up and tore the rag out of George’s mouth and he gasped for breath, and then he was crying, “Dream, I’m – I’m s-sorry, Dream, I should have told you-,”

Dream didn’t wait one second longer before crushing George in a hug, and George couldn’t hug him back but he buried his face in Dream’s shoulder, crying softly, and his heart was going to beat through his chest, his thoughts skittering, *thank god, thank god, he doesn’t hate me, he doesn’t hate me -*

He heard the last guard fall heavily to the ground, heard Sapnap shout “god *damn* it!”, and then his friend was at the cell door, too, his face stricken.

Dream pulled away and grabbed George’s face, looking into his eyes. “We’re getting you out of here.”

The words struck both fear and hope into George’s heart. “But – Daniel --,”

“I don’t care about him,” Dream almost shouted. “Come on, George. Let’s go, let’s go.”

“The chains,” George breathed, and Dream’s head whipped around, looking for keys.

“Fuck it,” Sapnap said, and he ran back to grab the guard’s sword. He came back and pinned one of the chains between the sword and the stone floor, and then leaned his full weight against it, trying to break the links.

“It’s not working,” George said, panicking again.

“Where are the keys, the fucking keys,” Dream hissed, standing up and rooting around the

room to look for them, as Sapnap grunted as the first chain finally snapped free, leaving three more tying George to the wall.

“Any help here, George?” Sapnap hissed, but George shook his head – “I don’t know how to break these, I-,” but then he realized his mouth was free, and his mind scrambled a spell, for something that could help –

In one awful instant, there were a dozen knights inside the dungeon.

Sapnap immediately slammed the door to the cell closed, struggling to keep out the men pushing against him from the opposite side, and Dream was at George’s side again with a key, his hands shaking as he tried to take the cuffs off, but it was too late. George knew it was too late.

“Dream,” he said, and Dream shook his head as though he knew what George was trying to do, but George pleaded, “Dream, please, look at me.”

And he did as the men outside the cell kept shouting, and someone slammed against the door Sapnap was struggling against.

“Everything I did, I did for you,” George breathed, and nothing could tear his eyes away from Dream’s. “I need you to know that I chose this, and that it’s worth it, Dream.”

“I – I can’t let you do this, George, I don’t deserve it,” Dream whispered, his eyes filling with tears.

“You do,” George said with a breathless laugh, and with his one free hand, he reached up to cup Dream’s face. “You have a great destiny, Dream. You can do it without me. T- talk to my gran, she- she’ll help you. And tell her I love her,” and then tears were spilling down his face, “and -,”

And then the door was broken down and Sapnap was being dragged away, thrown to the ground, and Dream was torn away from him, and George was grabbed and shoved against the wall, his breath knocked out of him. He gasped raggedly for air as he saw Dream fighting against three men, his face wild and manic, and god, he was amazing, he knocked down two knights before one of them got the upper hand, but they did get the upper hand – someone struck him in his back with the handle of their sword and Dream fell to his knees with a short cry, and they pinned him to the ground, and it was over. It was done with.

George felt another rag being stuffed in his mouth, harsher, tied tighter than the first, biting into his cheek, cutting off his oxygen entirely for a second, and his arms were yanked back and placed in new chains, and he gave a muffled cry as he was shoved to the ground, his shoulder twisting painfully, a cut opening up on his forehead where his head slammed against the stone.

There were so many voices, so many people, all overwhelming him –

But as he opened his eyes, blinking through the haze of pain, he saw Dream, pinned to the ground only a few feet away from him, looking at him with wide, desperate eyes.

“George,” he heard Dream choke, still struggling against the hands that were holding him down, “George, it’s okay. I’ll save you, I’ll –,”

And then he was being pulled away, and George lost sight of him, and he felt something make contact with the side of his head and he fell into darkness.

They woke him up in the morning and George realized that his time was up.

They dragged him out into the courtyard. The sun was just barely over the horizon. George blinked into the light, his head throbbing where it had been hit last night.

His fuzzy vision focused on the pyre.

It was a tall pole surrounded by kindling. Seeing it sent full-body tremors running through him. He tried vaguely to pull against the guards holding him, but he was too weak. They lashed him to the pole, and he slumped over slightly as they left him.

There were people surrounding him, he knew, some whispering, some jeering at him. He couldn't see any of their faces - didn't want to. Didn't need to know who had come to see him die.

Behind him, he heard Daniel's voice, and it made him jerk up, twisting to look up at the balcony where the King stood. Daniel was alone, except for a few knights. Dream wasn't there.

"...guilty of sorcery, sentenced to death by fire," Daniel said, and then the executioner came forward and lit the kindling at George's feet.

The first thing he felt was the smoke, its acrid burn in his nose and his lungs. He coughed as the fire caught on quicker and quicker, licking up new wood, flickering at the bottoms of his feet.

As soon as he started to feel the heat of the flames, he panicked, his mind kicking into survival mode, and he found the strength to push the fire down using his magic, taming the flames. He caught his breath as he focused his vision, wondering if this – could work – if he could free himself –

"He's using magic," the king snarled from behind him, "stop him," and one of his knights stepped to his side and aimed his bow true, and George screamed as an arrow lodged itself in his side, the pain overloading his brain and stopping his magic. The flames grew hotter, brighter, larger –

"No, *no*, *NO*," he heard a broken scream, and he looked up through the smoke to see Dream, *Dream*, his face tear-stained and horrified, looking up at him – the prince had just burst through the castle doors, and a group of knights immediately swarmed in on him, holding him back as he struggled against their grip, his gaze locked on the pyre. "Please, *you can't do this!* GEORGE!"

And it was terrible, and the pain in George's chest was nearly as bad as the flames licking at his legs, but as he stared back at Dream, he started to feel peaceful for the first time, because Dream was alive, he would be alive, and this wouldn't be for nothing.

"Dream," he called, but the smoke choked him, and he coughed harshly, spots dancing behind his eyes.

"George," Dream's voice drifted through the haze, and he was sobbing – "I'm sorry – I tried -,"

George nodded. He knew.

He kept his eyes on Dream until the smoke blinded him, and then he leaned his head back

and looked towards the sky.

His mother greeted him.

He knew her immediately and fell into her arms, tears flowing uncontrollably.

“Your job is done,” she said, smoothing his hair with her hand, and he shuddered. “You did everything right, George. You did everything perfectly.”

“Will he be okay?” George sniffled.

She pulled him back so she could look at him in his face. “It will not be easy for him,” she said honestly. “But you did what you needed to do.”

“I wish I could be there,” he whispered. “To help him.”

“In another life, you were. But now, it’s time for you to rest.”

And he did, guided by the sound of wind chimes into a song that he already knew by heart.

Chapter End Notes

why was dream so much more accepting, so quickly? i imagine you ask. good question! well, the easy answer is because this isn't 'canon', lmao. but i also do genuinely believe that dream would never let anything actually bad happen to george. facing down the consequences of that execution so relatively early – i think he’d be able to shake off his dad’s brainwashing a lot faster.

this is all i have to post so far - but i'll be back sometime soon!! thanks for reading! :)

epilogue: a new age

Chapter Notes

epilogue time epilogue time epilogue time!!!! everything should be pretty self-explanatory! I hope you like it!

OBVIOUS SPOILERS FOR THE ENTIRETY OF PROTECTED!!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

epilogue: a new age

George took to the role of Court Sorcerer with great enthusiasm. Which was fortunate, because the transition of restoring magic to Camelot was not as easy as Dream had once – perhaps naively – hoped.

He realized this the first time a sorcerer was brought to the castle in chains.

“Your Highness,” said the Duke of Hartford, looking quite proud of himself. “I have caught a sorcerer red-handed!”

Dream looked back and forth from the Duke to the poor man in chains, who looked frightened half to death. “And... what has he done?”

The Duke looked mildly confused, but forged on. “He... he has committed sorcery, Your Majesty!”

Dream stifled a sigh and heard George shift from side to side where he stood next to the throne. “Sir... Peter, was it?”

“Yes, Your Majesty!”

“Sorcery has been legalized in Camelot for weeks, now.”

The smile froze on Peter’s face. “Ah.”

“Were you not made aware of this?”

“I admit that I heard rumors of something of the sort,” Sir Peter said, “but I... uh... well. I suppose I assumed they were simply rumors.”

Dream and George shared a look.

They decided they needed to go on a little tour of the kingdom. It had been a while since Dream had visited the territories, anyway; it would be a two-birds-in-one-stone kind of trip, both a way for Dream to make clear that magic was now legal and acceptable in Camelot, and a way for the king to reestablish relationships with the various nobles under his rule.

The first city they visited was absolutely miserable.

It wasn't that Lord Richard was outwardly *hostile*, per say – he wasn't that stupid. But if he thought that Dream didn't catch every derisive comment he made at George's expense, he was dead wrong. Lord Richard looked ready to burn George on the stake that evening, given half the chance; he barely made eye contact with him, except to give him a disgusted sort of glance, and refused to shake his head when they first arrived, focusing entirely on Dream, instead.

It grated harshly on Dream's nerves. Despite Lord Richard's vocal acceptance of the new magic decree, it was clear that his prejudice against magic hadn't wavered.

Dream and George were given separate rooms to stay in, but the minute they were left alone by Richard's staff to rest, Dream crossed the hall to sit in George's room with him. Which is where he saw that George's room was basically a dim little closet, without even the necessary materials to make a fire in the hearth. Not that George minded – he merely lit his own fire – but "it's the principle of the thing," Dream ranted, anger bubbling up in his chest.

"It'll take time," George said mildly, though when he stood up, he nearly knocked his head on the ceiling, which slanted low over the fireplace.

"This isn't just hesitancy," Dream insisted. "This is outright malice."

"We'll show him that magic can be helpful," George said. "He'll come around."

"We only have a few days here, George," Dream sighed, sitting at the foot of George's bed and then immediately standing back up again. "Are you kidding me? I can *feel* the springs through the mattress. Next, there'll be rats in here."

But George was already grimacing, pointing at the corner of the room. "Do dead ones count?"

(Needless to say, George spent the night in Dream's room - and for entirely innocent reasons, too.)

The second day passed much the same as the first. Richard humored Dream, nodding and at least pretending at listening as Dream explained how magic was being utilized across the kingdom: their crops would be fortified throughout the summer, the most recent waves of yellow fever could be fought back handily with healing potions, and everyday tasks were made leagues easier with even one sorcerer to help.

But the instant George chimed in or attempted to ask Richard a question, the same look of open contempt would cross his face; his answers became short and curt, and the conversation was

finished before it had begun.

Dream, of course, was happy to stand up for George – was happy to make clear that George was both under his protection and was a trusted ally – and George was long-suffering. But by the end of the second day, Dream could finally see the treatment wearing on him in the same way it was grating against him. Especially considering they had two dozen stops left on their trip.

“Okay,” George said slowly, that evening. “We may need another approach.”

“Yes,” Dream said immediately. *Let George get abused until other people have a change of heart* was a tactic that was growing less and less appealing with every lived second. “Agreed. Completely. Any ideas?”

George pursed his lips and brought his legs up onto Dream’s bed, folding them underneath him. “Well... I might.” Then he gave Dream a curious look, as though he was afraid Dream might spook.

“What are you thinking?” he asked, suddenly nervous.

George opened his mouth to speak, then closed it. “Nothing,” he said. “Give me some time to think it over, okay?”

“Okay,” Dream said. “But we leave here tomorrow, you know.”

George sighed and rolled his eyes as he fell back onto his pillow. “This plan will take some time. And I think Richard might be a lost cause, anyway.”

When they retrieved their horses the following day to find Daisy ungroomed and looking practically feral, Dream was inclined to agree with the lost cause assessment. He was also inclined to give Lord Richard a proper dressing-down, in front of his servants and everything, shouting until the man went beet-red in humiliation.

“You didn’t have to do that,” George muttered as they left. He looked embarrassed, if slightly pleased.

“Yes, George,” Dream said. “Yes, I did.”

They made it halfway to the next town before George spoke up again.

“Have you ever felt... especially... magical?” he asked.

Dream looked at him like he had grown a second head.

“Well... have you?” George asked nervously.

“What does it mean to feel *magical*?” Dream said slowly.

“Um,” George said. “Well.” His face went slightly red. “Good question.”

Dream twisted slightly in his saddle, trusting his horse to follow the well-worn path. “Why are you asking me this?”

George sighed, his hands twisting Daisy’s reins. “It’s the only idea I’ve come up with,” he said. “It’s easy enough for people to dismiss me. I mean – who cares who I am? Sure, you can stick up for me, but there’s still a degree of separation there. It’s one thing to demand loyalty to the crown. But it’s another thing to demand loyalty to *me*.”

“Okay...”

“But... what if *you* could do magic? What if you could show everyone that there *is* no separation between the crown and magic anymore?”

It was such a strange thought that it took Dream a few minutes to process. “Is... is that even possible?” he asked with genuine confusion.

George shrugged. “Not everyone can do magic, but many people can, if they’re taught. You just need a spark of magical energy, and – something tells me you probably have some rattling around in there.”

Dream laughed shortly, and then thought about it further.

There was something very deep inside of him that felt afraid of that possibility. Or perhaps repelled by it. But it was a piece of himself he had long since learned to recognize and then question. And the longer he thought about George’s suggestion, the more it made sense. He didn’t have to *be* a sorcerer. He just had to learn enough to be able to show the people of his kingdom how serious he was about accepting magic. It would put weight behind his words.

“So,” he said, turning towards George, who bit his lip. “Are you going to teach me?”

The smile that split George’s face was surprising – and incredibly endearing.

Lord Gerald of Strafford was far more excited to see them than Richard had been, and he welcomed the two of them into his castle with open arms. Dream and George enjoyed a fine evening at his dinner table before retiring to their chambers – and then George started digging through his pack, still dressed in the dark blue robes he wore as Court Sorcerer, looking for something in particular.

“There it is,” he said finally, pulling out a thick book.

Dream groaned. “I didn’t realize I’d be going back to school.”

“It’s *fun* school,” George said, collapsing on the floor directly next to him, so that Dream’s right knee bumped against George’s left. “It’s *magic* school.” He set the book down in front of them and started flipping through the pages until he landed on a page with an illustration of a small

flame at its center.

“This is one of the easiest spells,” he said, pushing it towards Dream. Dream peered at the page, but it was written in the strange sorcerer’s language – entirely illegible to him.

“I can’t read these letters,” he said, brushing his fingers over the words.

“Oh,” George said, as though he’d forgotten that not everyone was bilingual in the ancient alphabet. He scrambled for a blank page and pen and then wrote out a word that he handed to Dream. The paper read, *forbearnan*.

“Fur-bare-nan,” Dream tried.

George’s mouth twisted like he was trying not to smile.

“You can’t make fun of me,” Dream accused, feeling embarrassed. “I’m trying.”

“You’re right,” George said, patting his knee, which slightly annoyed Dream. “You need to pronounce the *o* and the *e* a little – I dunno, stronger. And put the emphasis on the second syllable. It’s like – fore-*byair*-nan.”

They practiced a little while longer until George was satisfied with Dream’s articulation. George seemed jittery, almost giddy with excited energy; Dream tried to match his enthusiasm, but felt slightly out of his league.

“Now,” George said, “hold out your palm, like this -,” and Dream mirrored his motion, holding his palm up and slightly cupping his fingers. “Then say the spell.”

Dream got nervous and closed his hand into a fist. “You first. Please.”

George’s eyes sparkled. “Alright, then.” He took a breath and opened his palm.
“Forbearnan.”

An orange flicker of light immediately sparked to life in George’s hand, and Dream stared at it, enraptured at how easily George had summoned it. George rolled it from one hand to another, a pleased grin on his face.

“Now you’re just showing off,” Dream muttered.

“Your turn,” George said in response, closing his fist and snuffing out the fire.

Dream took a deep breath, trying to focus as hard as he could. Then he lifted up his palm, staring at it intently, visualizing a flame like the one George had just summoned.

“Forbearnan,” he said.

Nothing.

“*Forbearnan*,” he said, harsher this time, but his hand stubbornly refused to light on fire.

George’s lips pressed into a thin line. “You’re saying it right,” he said. “I think it’s just missing the magic bit.”

Dream scoffed and dropped his hand, suddenly feeling very foolish. “Oh, just that?”

George looked guilty. “Don’t get mad, Dream. I’m still learning how to teach this.”

"I'm not mad, I'm just -," Dream paused and took a breath. He felt frustration rising up in his chest, but it wasn't at George; he reached over and grabbed George's hand, and they sat there for a moment, gathering their respective thoughts.

"I get that it's probably hard to describe, because it's so natural for you," Dream eventually said, letting George's hand go and shifting so that they were facing each other more directly. "But what does magic... feel like? To you? I mean – what *should* it feel like, for me?"

George paused before he spoke, and Dream paid careful attention to his expression; noticed the soft lines that weariness had worn into his face. "It *is* hard to describe," he eventually said.

Dream tilted his head. "How about you do some real magic? I'm sure *forbearnan* isn't exactly heavy lifting for you," he said dryly, and George glanced away modestly. "Do something else, and just... talk. As it happens. Tell me what you're feeling."

George nodded slowly. "Okay. I can try."

The fire flickered in the hearth and bathed them in a dim orange light as George shifted position, drawing himself up a little taller where he sat and taking a deep breath. Sitting cross-legged, he rested his hands on his knees, palms-up and closed into loose fists. The shadows of the room shifted across his face.

And then George started speaking – a string of ancient words that Dream couldn't even begin to visualize. There was an immediate shift in energy in the room, as though the air was folding towards him like a pulled sheet.

George's eyes closed in concentration. He kept speaking, his hands twitching slightly; and then Dream watched as small lights began to appear around George. They were pinpricks, at first, and then they grew larger, and multiplied; George started moving his hands, and the lights followed his movements, swirling out into the dark corners of the room, sticking against the ceiling. Soon, the little lights were as numerous as the night sky; and Dream realized with a sharp inhale that that was exactly what George was trying to replicate. The lights were rearranging themselves in the dark room, creating the constellations Dream had memorized as a child, moving in the same strange, unknowable arcs as the stars themselves.

Lost for words, Dream looked to George's face, and saw that his eyes were open, watching the lights with the same wonder he felt.

"What does it feel like?" he remembered to ask, his voice nearly hoarse.

George looked at him. "It feels," he said, and then stopped, closing his eyes again, his forehead softly furrowed.

"I can feel everything," he said then, and Dream felt a shiver run down his spine. "I feel... aware, of everything in the room, in a way I'm usually not. I feel the floor I'm sitting on, I feel the air against my skin, it's... it's like I'm actually *here*. I'm a part of the world, not separate from it."

He opened his eyes. They were dark and reflected the pinprick stars.

"You're amazing," Dream said, caught up with the sight.

George blinked, then grinned sheepishly. "That's not the point of this."

"Still true," Dream said as George lifted his hands to rotate the stars slightly. He shifted closer to George so they were looking up at the makeshift sky together, their shoulders nearly

touching.

“It’s like a tingle, I guess,” George said softly. “It starts in my chest, and then... in my hands,” he said, closing his hands to brush his fingers against his palms. “It’s energy. Focused energy. It requires attention. And you can guide it, once you learn how it works.”

“Attention,” Dream echoed, looking at his own hands, calloused and battle-rough. Wondering if they were even capable of the kind of gentle focus George was displaying.

Perhaps reading his thoughts, George dropped his hands, though the stars remained suspended close to the ceiling. He turned so that he was kneeling next to Dream and reached out, putting one hand on Dream’s and another gently against his chest.

“It starts right here,” George said, pressing into the center of Dream’s chest, where it rose and fell with breath. “It feels like... walking into the first cold day of fall. Or jumping into water. When you’re suddenly, completely aware of everything around you. Like...” and then he started to blush, looking at Dream almost shyly.

“Like what?” Dream said softly.

George hesitated. “Like.”

Then he shifted forward and kissed Dream, very gently – in a way that would have felt like second nature, had it not, still, astonished him.

And – *oh* – he felt it, he felt what George meant; that feeling in his chest, right under George’s hand, like a burn without pain; that awareness of every place his body touched the floor, touched the air, touched George. It was all the same, really; and when George pulled away, Dream stared at him with wide eyes.

“I think I get it,” he said.

George’s eyebrows lifted. “You want to try the spell again?”

Dream nodded shakily and George sat back, moving his hands away and giving Dream space to sit forward, holding his palm out again.

There was the fear again. That instinctual desire to withdraw into himself. But when Dream felt it, he just thought of the way George looked, when he was casting his spell; the way his face glowed, like he was in tune with something Dream couldn’t quite understand.

It was beautiful. This was a good thing.

“Forbearnan,” Dream said, and a flame – a tiny, flickering flame – sprung to life in his hand.

He stared at it in pure astonishment. It was nothing more than a tongue of fire, orange and warm against his hand. But it was there, dancing over his palm, clinging to life. And – just like George had said – he could feel the energy in his palm, hovering warm and bright.

“You did it,” George said, and when Dream looked up, he had never seen him happier. Over George’s shoulder, Dream could see the stars start to glow brighter and brighter until they looked like they might burn themselves out.

It was worth losing the flame in his hand to kiss him again. He could always bring it back.

He was nervous. He was very, very nervous. He was so nervous that his hands were shaking, which was unlike him. Very unlike him.

"This will either work," he told George, "or I will look like a complete idiot in front of this entire city." They were standing inside the castle, waiting for Lord Gerald to call them out onto the balcony. They had asked to make an announcement to his people, and hundreds of people were gathered outside, waiting to hear from the king. "And then I will look like a total idiot in front of the entire kingdom, because the gossip will be even worse."

George seemed unperturbed, staring at Dream with his usual quiet confidence. "Well, it's a good thing it'll work."

Dream sighed and gave him a look. "And if it doesn't, I expect you'll just go out and – and kiss me until it does, huh?"

George kind of snickered. "I mean, if you want me to..."

"No," Dream said, even though the thought made him start to blush, something he tried to hide from George, whose eyebrows were already raising in delight. "No. That won't be necessary."

George's tone was smug. "Whatever you say, Your Highness."

The curtain to the balcony was pulled back, and despite the little jolt in his chest, Dream took a steadying breath and kicked himself into action. He could do this. In... an actually pretty literal sense, he was born to do this.

He took to the balcony, George trailing behind him, and raised his hands as the people below him, gathered in the plaza next to the castle, cheered. King Clay grinned down at them, clapping Lord Gerald on the shoulder, who looked pleased.

"I cannot thank you enough for your hospitality," he said to the people of Strafford, the crowd falling silent so that his words could carry. "Lord Gerald has been a generous host, and I have been glad to see that you have been taken care of through this winter."

Dream took a deep breath.

"There is a more specific reason I came here today," he said. "Which is to inform you all of the return of magic to Camelot."

The silence in the plaza took on a different quality. It was more hesitant, or perhaps more afraid.

"I know you may not believe me when I tell you magic is legal in our kingdom, now," Dream said, holding on to the railing of the balcony. "Perhaps you think I may change my mind, as many rulers have done before. Or perhaps you do not wish to accept the change. I understand these feelings.

"My purpose in appearing here today is to make clear that there is no separation between the crown and magic in Camelot," Dream said, to scattered whispers. "This is a good thing for our

kingdom. You shouldn't be afraid of it. And if you are a sorcerer, you shouldn't be afraid to make yourself known. And I'll show you why."

Moment of truth. Dream gave George one last look before lifting his palm. He thought of the previous night – thought of the feeling in his chest. Thought of George's words.

"Forbearnan," he said, and the flame appeared in his palm again, bigger, this time, and brighter.

Shocked gasps and murmurs rippled through the crowd, as many pushed forward to see what was happening up close. Dream saw confusion and fear on the faces of some of the people below him – but he also saw curiosity, and amazement, and even some people who looked overjoyed.

"I could not punish you without punishing myself," he said to those people – those people who, like George, had been hiding, all this time. And then he closed his fist, banishing the flame. "And you cannot speak against magic users without speaking out against your king."

Dream turned to Lord Gerald, who looked astonished, but who dipped his head in understanding. Then he turned back to the crowd and said what he could feel with his whole chest – the wave of change and excitement that he could also feel crashing through the plaza.

"It is a new age in Camelot," he said.

Chapter End Notes

:D !

I think I'm gonna do at least one more epilogue one shot? I've had a few requests for a wedding scene, which... like, yes, but it has also been very hard to write in a way that's not just pure, absolute tooth-rotting fluff... which isn't bad, but also isn't my usual speed. idk, I need a way to get some conflict in there, so I'll see if I can come up with something interesting to do with it!

really hoped y'all liked this one!! genuinely love u all <33333

epilogue: wedding bells

Chapter Notes

If you are celebrating today - Merry Christmas! I hope you enjoy this epilogue, which has been a long time coming. It took me a while to figure it out, but I'm finally really happy with it - and I hope you enjoy! <3

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

epilogue: wedding bells

His head in his hands, his gaze fixed on the floor, Sapnap spoke with a solemn weight to his words.

“This is it for me,” he said. “It's the end of the line.”

The newest knight in Camelot and Sapnap's fast friend, Karl, took a seat next to him on one of the several long pews that had been set up in the Great Hall. He looked slightly out of his league. “I think you are being a *little* overdramatic.”

“You don't understand,” Sapnap said as a servant hurried past them with an armful of firewood, his head and shoulders covered in the snow that was falling in fat, happy flakes outside the vaulted windows. “Bad gave me one job, and I *still* managed to mess it up.”

“It's not that bad,” Karl said weakly. “There can still be a wedding without the wedding rings... right?”

Sapnap let out a groan and slumped even lower into his seat.

“Well, okay. Where's the last place you saw them?”

“I had them with me, I swear. They were *right here* -,”

“Who was here?” came Bad's voice, and Sapnap and Karl both leapt to their feet, whirling as their friend strode up to them, looking harried. Bad's glasses were slightly askew, his hair sticking up around his ears, and he said, “what are you talking about?”

“Nothing, Bad,” Karl said quickly, as Sapnap's face drained of color. “How are you? Is there anything left to be done?”

“Oh, not much,” Bad said with a huff of breath. “All we have yet to do is set up the tables for the feast, get all the food set out, put the musicians in place, set up the bouquets at the altar and find the priest and make sure he knows his cues, oh and we still have to figure out what to do with Lord Eril once he gets here, but as long as he's not seated near Lady Esther he should be

manageable. So yeah, we're basically done. Actually, that reminds me -," he looked a little closer at Sapnap, who looked close to passing out. "Sapnap, are you sure you're okay?"

Sapnap's voice squeaked. "I – of course I'm okay. Why *wouldn't* I be okay."

"You know you're not the one getting married, right?" Bad said wearily. "Like, we're on the same page about that?"

"He's just sad he missed his chance with George," Karl said, giggling as Sapnap shoved him with his shoulder.

"Very funny. See you guys later," Bad said, and left them in the Hall. Trusting Sapnap with the rings had been a good idea, he thought: it was a task that was important enough that Sapnap felt he was contributing, but not so high-maintenance that Bad had to oversee it. He had enough of those tasks already; he turned over his to-do list in his head as he navigated the flurry of the castle, servants and staffmembers rushing by on all sides, their arms heavy with garlands and bouquets and ribbons for the walls or carrying trays of food for the feast. It was chaos, but it was working: he had everything under control, he thought, and then he nearly ran head-first into Tommy.

"Oi, watch it, big man!" Tommy said, stumbling back from their collision.

"Tommy?" Bad said, sudden panic freezing his heart in his chest. "Guests aren't supposed to be here for – oh, God. What time is it?" He whirled, disoriented.

"Calm down, calm down, we came here early," Tommy said with a grin. Tubbo came up beside him, shaking snow from his brown coat. "Wilbur thought you might need some help setting up."

Bad swallowed hard and immediately thought of decorations falling in heaps, pitchers of wine sent spilling over the floor, the Great Hall set completely ablaze –

"I don't think we need any help, Tommy," he said weakly, just as a shout came from behind him: "Lord Bad, some assistance?"

"Be there in a second," he shouted over his shoulder, then turned back to the two chaos agents standing happily in front of him. "Is Wilbur here?"

"Not yet, he's coming up behind," said Tubbo.

"Why don't you two," Bad said, and then paused, trying to think of a single task he could assign them that wouldn't result in utter disaster.

"Tommy," came a sudden shout, and Sapnap and Karl rushed up behind him.

"Thank God," Bad said quickly, "Sapnap, you can watch them, right?" and disappeared for his duties.

Sapnap was grabbing Tommy's arm before Bad was even halfway turned around. "What did you do?"

"What are you talking about?" Tommy said, wrenching his arm away. "I literally just got here!" Then he did a double-take, giving Sapnap a gleeful grin. "What are you *wearing*?"

Sapnap pulled up short. He had on a kind of vest and a tunic with flowy sleeves – not exactly his standard choice of clothing, and he started to go red as Tommy and Tubbo failed to hide their

snickers. “I – I’m in the wedding party, you know, it’s – it’s customary!”

“Customary,” Tommy said with a suddenly serious expression, nodding.

“Shut up, you little gremlin,” Sapnap muttered. “If you think this is funny, it’s *not*. Clay’s gonna have my head on a stick if I don’t find those rings, so just tell me where you put them.”

Tubbo’s eyes went as wide as saucers. “You lost the rings?” he whispered, horrified.

“Oh, that is just too good,” Tommy said, crossing his arms. “All these adults thinking I’m the one who’s going to wreak havoc, and what have I ever done? Certainly not lost the king’s wedding rings, that’s for –,”

“Stop it, all of you,” Karl said, holding up his hands. “The only thing left to do is look for them, right? Sapnap, where have you been today?”

The knight ran a distressed hand through his hair. “Um, uh. The kitchen, the cellars, the Hall, George’s room – oh, god, what if I dropped them out in the courtyard? The snow will have covered them up by now, I’m screwed I’m so so screwed –,”

“Don’t think about that,” Karl said. “Tommy, search every inch of the Hall, okay? I’ll take the kitchens, Sapnap, you go to the cellars, and Tubbo – go say hi to George, and look for them in his room. But don’t let him know what you’re doing, okay? He doesn’t need to stress out about this.”

“Why me?” Tubbo asked, his voice a high squeak.

“We’ve been banished, and George doesn’t need Tommy to antagonize him.”

“Holy *shit*, you lot really do think I’m just some little demon creature, don’t you? You think I’d antagonize a man on the day of his *holy matrimony* –,”

Sapnap made a little motion towards him and Tommy jumped back.

“Team,” Karl said sharply. “We’re not messing this up for King Clay and George. Right?”

“Right,” Tubbo said immediately, as Sapnap and Tommy glared at each other.

“Then go,” Karl said, pushing Tommy and Sapnap by the shoulders until they reluctantly turned. “Go!”

They separated, and Tubbo weaved his way through the steady stream of servants, heading up the stairs and towards the chambers. At first he started to head towards King Clay’s room, then stopped short; George would be in his own room, wouldn’t he? But when he reached George’s doors, he noted, with some alarm, that what looked to be a wooden plank was placed across the handles to the door, bolting them shut.

Tubbo pulled the plank away and opened the door, only to have George nearly fall on top of him.

“Tubbo!” George exclaimed as Tubbo caught him, helping him stand. He was slightly disheveled and looked around wildly. “Thank you!”

“Hi,” Tubbo said slowly.

“When did you get here?” George asked. He looked very nice, dressed in fine clothes with a dark blue cloak fastened around his neck. He also looked like he had been leaning against the

locked door up until the moment Tubbo opened them.

“A bit ago,” Tubbo said, “I wanted to say hello. Um -,” feeling strange: “are you being held captive?”

George exhaled through his nose, his mouth a thin line. “Bad locked me up in here to stop me from trying to help,” he said, glancing down the hallway as though he expected his warden to come storming back any minute. “Or maybe to – oh, I don’t know what he was doing.”

“But you’re not being,” Tubbo looked for the right word: “converted?”

George tilted his head.

“Coerced?” Tubbo tried again.

“Oh,” George said, smiling in a way that crinkled up the edges of his eyes. “No, no, Tubbo, I’m fine. Thank you.”

“Okay, good,” Tubbo said, relieved. “Congratulations on the wedding, then. Hey, when this is done, does that make you King George?”

“Uh,” George said, going red, “no, no, that’s. That’s not how it – that’s not important.”

“Okay,” said Tubbo with a shrug - and then he remembered his task. “Can I come in?”

“In here?”

“Yeah, if that’s okay,” Tubbo said, craning his neck to try and glimpse inside the room. He realized, then, that he had no idea what he was looking for: were the rings just... loose? Were they in a little box? That’s how he had imagined wedding rings, but it wasn’t like he had any first-hand knowledge. And what kind of box? Wooden, or velvet? Or -

“What are you doing?” George asked, amused, and Tubbo realized he had been staring blankly over his shoulder.

“Nothing,” Tubbo said. “I just would like... to come inside.”

George stared at him. His gaze was neutral, yet it seemed to pierce right down to the core of Tubbo’s soul. “What’s going on?” he said sternly.

“Sapnap lost the rings,” Tubbo blurted out.

“Ah,” said George.

“I wasn’t supposed to tell you but now I feel like I should probably tell you,” he continued in a rush.

George nodded. “And he’s sent you here to look for them?” Tubbo nodded back, and George swept out his arm. “Be my guest.”

As Tubbo rushed in and started to look carefully around the room, George slipped down the hallway, heading away from the sounds of noise and bustle coming from the Great Hall. The rings weren’t in his room, he knew that much; hardly anything was, really, since George had barely stayed there for several months. He wasn’t sure if the missing rings situation should have sent him into a panic, but he didn’t feel panicked. Whether that was because he was responding to the news in a well-adjusted way, or if it was because his capacity to experience any stress whatsoever had

been overloaded to the point of malfunction from this whole wedding affair, remained to be seen.

Regardless, if the rings were missing, he should probably tell Dream. That was a reasonable thing to do. That was a reasonable justification to make his way to Dream's room, and not at all influenced by the fact that George's stomach had been doing twists since he woke at dawn, and he hadn't been allowed to speak to Dream all day. Not at all.

He stopped in front of Dream's doors, and held up a hand. He didn't knock.

He felt nervous. Why was he nervous? Suddenly, he moved to fix his hair, to fix his clothes. He looked alright, didn't he? He picked up his hand to knock again but paused. This was fine, wasn't it?

Before he could decide, the doors swung open. And - well. It all melted away, for a moment.

Because Dream was there, backlit by the sun coming through his windows, the light glinting off the crown on his head and illuminating the golden flyaway hairs around his head. He was dressed handsomely – a dark green tunic, the neckline exposing just a sliver of his chest, well-fitted dark trousers. His eyes were wide, and flickered down, taking George in just as George stared at him.

Dream took a step back and closed the door in his face.

"Hey," George said in surprise, blinking. "What?"

"I don't think we're supposed to see each other," he heard Dream say. His voice was muffled through the door, but still clear – and he sounded *nervous*, his voice kind of wavering. "Before the ceremony, I mean. Isn't it bad luck?"

"Oh," George said, feeling a smile spread across his face. "I dunno. I think that's usually about the bride. Do you think it matters if it's just two husbands?"

There was a very long silence from the other side of the door, punctuated by a soft thud against the wood.

"Dream?" George said. "Is something wrong?"

"No!" Dream said loudly, clearing his throat. "No. Nothing's wrong. It's just... wow. *Husbands.*"

George bit down on his smile, leaning his shoulder against the door. "Don't tell me you're getting cold feet."

"*Never,*" came Dream's vehement reply. "My feet are so warm, they're, like, hot. My feet are on fire right now, George."

George laughed, rolling his eyes fondly.

"Why did you come here? I thought I heard Bad had you locked up somewhere," Dream said.

"I, uh. I don't really know," George said. His palms itched; he wished he could just be near Dream, just to hold his hand. "I guess this is all getting a little overwhelming. I'm feeling... nervous. I know it's dumb."

Dream sighed. "It's not dumb. I know what you mean."

A short pause, interrupted by the shout of someone dropping a metal tray to the floor somewhere down the hall. Then Dream said, “you remember what I told you, right?”

George snorted. “Probably a little too late for that,” he said, “but, yes. I remember.”

Months ago, by now. The night Dream had asked him. It felt alive in his memory, like George could relive every detail at will. The late summer evening; the meal they had shared, the walk through the courtyard, remembering scenes from their childhood. They had ended up in their clearing, that pile of large, flat rocks they had spent so many evenings on together. Fireflies glimmered around them. It felt like nothing to climb up what had once felt like a mountain, and when they reached the top, the little platform where they had sprawled out as children, Dream had turned to him, his face nervous and brave and lit by the moon.

“I’ve been wanting to ask you something,” he had said, “and I want you to know that you can say no, if you want, and it – and I’ll understand. Because – what I want to ask is – it would be a lot, and it wouldn’t be easy. I – I like what we have, and – and you know that it’s real, that – that I – that it’s permanent. I mean, it’s permanent for me. And – so – we don’t have to, if you don’t want to. That would be okay, I don’t – I don’t think anybody cares, or anybody who matters, anyway, it’s –,”

“Dream,” George cut him off, grabbing his hands, which were nervously gesturing.

Dream took a breath, looking down. “Um. Wow, it’s just. It’s really hard to say.”

George bit his lip. Everything felt focused and real. Time hadn’t slowed or sped up – he felt every second for exactly what it was worth. “What are you trying to say?”

“Would you marry me,” Dream said in a rush of air, “if I asked?”

George couldn’t help his exasperated grin as he prodded gently: “Are you asking?”

Dream had nodded, his face going red, and then George had said, “yes, Dream. I’ll marry you,” and then they were kissing, each of them smiling too much to do it very well, and afterwards, George had said, “that was a slightly terrible proposal, and you’re lucky that I love you too much to tell Sapnap about it.”

“I meant it, though – still mean it,” Dream said, pulling George back to the moment: the castle, the wedding. “If you don’t want to go through with it, you don’t have to. All that matters is that we’re together. We don’t need the ceremony for that to be true.”

“It’s okay. I do want to go through with it,” George reassured him. “I – I’ve got hot feet, too, Dream.”

Dream laughed, low and warm. “*Do* you.”

George rolled his eyes. “This is getting weird.”

“It’s just this one day,” Dream said. The door creaked as he shifted his weight against the wood. “This one stupid ceremony, and we’ll never have to do anything like this again.”

George nodded, feeling something flutter in his stomach. “And then we’ll be husbands.”

“Yeah,” Dream said, a smile in his voice. “Husbands.”

A little giggle escaped George’s mouth, and he stood up straight. “Well, then. I... guess I’ll see

you later.” But before he could leave, he remembered – and said, “By the way... Sapnap lost the rings.”

“No, he didn’t.”

“Yes, he did, Tubbo just told me -,”

“He doesn’t have the rings,” Dream said. “I have them.”

George furrowed his brow. “Why do *you* have them?”

“Because I knew he’d lose them.”

George scoffed and shook his head. “He is going to be so pissed at you.”

“Sapnap is going to be so relieved that he’s not being thrown in the dungeons that he won’t have the time to feel anything else,” Dream said.

At that moment, an entirely disheveled Bad slid around the corner. His gaze landed on George and George sucked in a breath.

“Busted,” he muttered.

“George,” Bad said, stalking down the corridor, “you better not have opened that door.”

“Now why would I do something stupid like that,” George said faintly, and heard Dream laugh.

“Good, because you know that would be bad luck,” Bad said, grabbing him by the arm and ushering him away. “Sorry, Dream,” he called over his shoulder, “you’ll have to be patient!”

“I’m counting down the minutes,” came Dream’s voice before George was tugged out of earshot.

George only made Sapnap stumble through his tortured explanation of how he had lost the wedding rings for a few minutes before telling him that Dream had been holding them the whole time. Dream was only partially right – Sapnap had looked utterly relieved for a moment, but that dissolved pretty quickly into muttered threats of treason as he marched towards Dream’s quarters.

"You look very handsome," Sylvia told him when he met with her before the ceremony. "Just like your father." George just smiled at her and kissed her cheek before leaving her to take her seat.

Unlike Dream’s proposal – which had been private, perfect, a moment in time taken just for them – the wedding was a group affair, more for the public’s sake than their own. As such, it passed in a series of flashes, a chain of disconnected moments that George would look back on with equal parts fondness and exhaustion.

The guests, from across the Five Kingdoms, gathered in the pews in the Great Hall. The snow, falling in blankets outside the windows. The weight of every gaze in the room fixed on George.

How it all fell away once he met Dream at the altar, and the two of them were finally able to

see each other face-to-face. If the first look had been somewhat spoiled, it didn't matter. Dream looked perfect, so very much *himself*, and he was looking at George with such an honest and heavy gaze that George felt pinned to the spot, listening to the priest say what needed to be said.

They had settled on vows very easily and very quickly, deciding that everything they needed to say to each other had already been said, and said better in private than could ever be said in front of a crowd. When the priest asked for their vows, Dream joined hands with George and softly said, "I accept you as my own."

George felt something light and airy in his chest as he repeated the vow. "I accept you as my own."

Then the rings, which they had chosen for each other: for George, a silver ring with an emerald stone; for Dream, a gold band with an embedded sapphire.

Kissing Dream, at that point, felt like the most obvious and natural thing in the world.

What else? There was the feast, and far too many people, until all their faces blended together, and it was all George could do to keep his head lifted up and a polite smile on his face. Plenty of food, and plenty of wine, to make it all tolerable.

There were standouts among the guests, of course: Bad, who they thanked profusely for managing to pull everything off without a hitch; and King Wilbur, who was always an entertaining guest, and who stole a mandolin from the court musicians to play them a song of his own composition. George was charmed and Dream may have seemed a bit threatened, and it was all very funny.

Many hours later, the party did not seem to be winding down, and Dream and George sat quietly at their table, watching their wedding guests get drunker and drunker. Sapnap was now singing some kind of sea shanty with Karl, while Bad watched on in thinly-veiled disdain.

"Do you think they'll notice," George muttered quietly, "if we ditch our own feast?"

Dream pondered the thought, stroking his chin. "It's an interesting proposal, my love," grinning as the unexpected pet name put a blush on George's face. "What would you have us be doing instead?"

"I have a few ideas," George said, his gaze flickering down as his gently bit his lower lip. He laughed as Dream took his turn to flush, and then – because he could, because he was allowed to – he brought a hand up to cup Dream's face, gently curling his fingers against his cheek.

"Improper," Dream chided playfully.

"You're my *husband*," George pouted.

"Still improper."

"Oh, I'll show you *improper* -,"

“*That* won’t be necessary,” Dream said, catching George’s straying hand, and a laugh bubbled up in his throat. Dream pressed a conciliatory kiss to the back of his hand, and George hummed, leaning over to rest his head on Dream’s shoulder.

“I have to admit, you two are starting to look slightly miserable,” came a voice, and Sapnap collapsed in the seat next to George, slinging his arm over the back of his chair.

George sat up and said, “That’s a very rude thing to say to someone on their wedding day.”

“Hey, I think I’m being pretty nice, considering how close I was to committing treason a few hours ago,” Sapnap said with a raised eyebrow at Dream.

“Watch it, Sir Moron,” Dream said, taking a sip of his wine.

“Sapnap,” George said, leaning over. “I think we’re, uh, ready to get out of here. Do you think you can, I dunno - make some kind of distraction? Make it easier for us to make a quick exit?”

Sapnap shook his head at him, narrowing his eyes. “This is all I am to you. I’m a little monkey you get to go do things for you when you’re too lazy to do them yourself.”

George crossed his arms. “You know it’s treason to insult me, now, too?”

Sapnap groaned as Dream cracked up, drawing attention to their table again. Sapnap stood. “You know what, fine. This is my wedding gift, from me to you. And don’t expect anything else.” But before he left, he paused and said, “and, uh, you guys know I’m... really happy for you. Even though you both make me *sick*,” with an accusatory punch of his finger. “I’m still happy for you.”

“Thank you, Sapnap,” said George.

“Now get to work, little monkey,” Dream said, laughing again as Sapnap subtly flipped him off.

“What do you think he’ll do?” George asked Dream, watching their friend return to his table and whisper something into Tommy’s ear.

“Probably something stupid,” Dream said, pushing his plate away. “And perfect.”

“We have very good friends,” George said.

“We do,” Dream murmured.

And a few minutes later, when Tommy and Sapnap staged some kind of tussle that accidentally caused an entire table to collapse, throwing excess wine over a dozen people’s laps, it was a chaotic end to the evening – and the perfect cover for the two guests of honor to slip away through the back door, laughing like they were kids again, hand in hand and stumbling into their future.

<3

For the record, the wedding vows were taken from an actual source that cited those words as a common medieval wedding vow, but I can't find the source now, I just wrote those words down a while ago because I found them while doing research and they killeddddd meeee :')

This is the last thing I plan on posting for Protected. I've really enjoyed uploading some of these extra scenes that I already had written, and writing a few epilogues - but from this point on, I would have to write new stuff to post, and I want to be able to focus my attention on other projects.

I'm so grateful to everyone who loved Protected, and especially to those of you who tagged along for these extra scenes - thank you so, so much for all of your incredibly kind comments and messages. I really hope you enjoyed this epilogue. And however you're celebrating, I hope you have a wonderful holiday season! <3

Aenqa

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